



## Adult Ed faces higher fees, fewer classes

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For 72-year-old Tom McNicholas, keeping physically and mentally active is key to living a long, healthy life. The Napa resident currently takes a yoga class through Napa Valley Adult Education. He's also taken bird-watching and a variety of other exercise classes over the past five years.

McNicholas pays only a \$25 annual fee to participate in Adult Ed classes for seniors — but that fee may soon increase due to budget reductions that will cut deeply into Adult Ed.

Napa Valley Adult Education, which is under the jurisdiction of the Napa Valley Unified School District, is one of the many programs facing cuts if state tax initiatives don't pass this November.

By this fall, Adult Ed could lose 50 percent of its reserve — about \$880,000 — as well as 5 percent of its funding, which is equal to about \$99,000, said Wade Roach, assistant superintendent of business services.

Gov. Jerry Brown hopes to raise \$6.9 billion in revenue by temporarily increasing the state sales tax and raising taxes on individuals who earn \$250,000 or more per year. The tax increases would expire in five years.

If the taxes don't pass, Napa Valley Unified will face a mid-year cut of up to \$450 per student and a gaping budget shortfall of \$8.6 million, Roach said. If that occurs, Adult Ed could face even deeper cuts mid-year in 2012-13 and could lose the remainder of its reserve — about \$850,000 — by the 2013-14 academic year.

Rhonda Slota, principal of Adult Ed, describes the

cuts as "doable" but also "painful."

Adult Ed's Napa State Hospital education program will most likely close by the end of this year, Slota said. The program provided GED prep, literacy, arts and crafts, and fitness classes to patients. Past budget cuts had already reduced the program from an average of 500 patients down to 295 patients served last year, Slota said. In previous years, the program supported eight part-time teachers — now there are only three.

In addition to the state hospital program closing, Adult Ed may also increase class fees for older adults.

"Traditionally, this has been our biggest program because this is a retirement community," Slota said.

Seniors currently pay a \$25 annual fee, but officials are considering switching to a pay-per-class fee structure, Slota said. It has not been decided how much each class would cost.

McNicholas said higher class fees could be difficult for seniors, many of whom are on fixed incomes.

"The affordability issue is very important to a lot of people," he said.

Unlike other programs offered through Adult Ed, the classes for seniors and state hospital patients don't receive supplemental funding, which is why those programs would feel the biggest impact from the cuts, Slota said.

Career and technical education, English as a second language, high school/GED, and parenting classes receive state and federal funding and align closely with the goals of the school district, Slota said. Those classes will remain largely intact.

Programs offered through Adult Ed serve a diverse population of more than 8,000 students throughout Napa Valley.

Slota said officials at Adult Ed have been purposefully building a substantial reserve in case of this type of emergency. If Adult Ed loses its entire reserve, she believes the program won't disappear, but it will have to be careful in its spending, she noted.

"It's going to be a much tighter budget without the reserve to fall back on," she said.

For Slota, there's no reason to blame anyone for the cuts.

“We have a very supportive district, administration and board who understand and appreciate lifelong learning,” she said. “But they have to make very hard decisions right now.”